

250 turn out for CISCRP's first AWARE for All program focusing specifically on oncology trials

By Ronald Rosenberg
CenterWatch Staff Writer

Mention clinical trials and reactions can vary from “don’t know much about them” to “not for me,” or the derogatory “I’m not a guinea pig”—all typical signs of a lack of understanding often due to a paucity of opportunities to learn about clinical research.

On a recent Friday morning, about 250 Houston-area residents turned out for “Let’s Talk about Ending Cancer,” a program developed by the **Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation** (CISCRP), an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to educating and informing the public and patients about clinical research,

and its AWARE for All program, which aims to educate and empower the public to make informed decisions about research participation.

Attendees of the event, AWARE’s first disease-specific program, heard from cancer specialists at the **University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston Methodist Cancer Center** and a private-practice oncologist, along with several cancer survivors and clinical trial participants talk about the benefits of volunteering and how to assess trial opportunities.

Prior to their presentations, attendees walked through what one participant called “information alley,” with representatives from local cancer organizations, the

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DrugDev acquisitions aim to build technology while reducing costs, complexity of clinical trials

By Ronald Rosenberg
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By assembling a suite of comprehensive services that target the quality, efficiency and management of clinical operations, **DrugDev**, a developer of a global network and data-sharing platform for Principal Investigators, is aiming to reduce the spiraling costs of clinical trials while taking on some big technology competition.

U.K.-based DrugDev’s acquisition of Newton, Mass.-based **TrialNetworks** earlier this month follows a \$50 million investment from **Invesco Perpetual** in 2013 to acquire companies and build internal technology capabilities. Last fall, DrugDev made its first

acquisition, of Audubon, Pa.-based **CFS Clinical**, a trial management program that provides a global payment network so sites receive prompt payment for their services.

The TrialNetworks purchase added a SaaS (Software as a Service) provider of a unified suite of integrated study management apps that provide new ways to manage progress and timelines for streamlining clinical operations.

By tackling trial complexity, timelines and costs to gain efficiency, DrugDev also is taking on technology giants such as **Oracle** for leadership in the fast-growing healthcare niche. It also is competing with **Medidata Solutions**, whose software platform allows sponsors to not only enter data but also

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CISCRP

American Cancer Society and the Center for Energy Balance in Cancer Prevention and Survivorship at M.D. Anderson. Free blood pressure, blood sugar and vision screenings were available, plus information on immunizations.

“In creating the AWARE for ALL program, our focus at CISCRP is strictly to educate patients, their families and the general public—including minorities and the underserved not represented in clinical trials—about clinical research and how best to make an educated decision about it,” said Jill McNair, national director of AWARE for All. “We want people to consider a clinical trial as a treatment option and have that in their back pocket as they talk to friends and families. Having these forums on clinical research enables people to start to think differently.”

“The tide has turned, as trials today have fresh new drugs, are much more professional, and the mistakes of the past where people were exploited and felt they were guinea pigs are no longer true,” said keynote speaker Yvette Williams-Brown, M.D., assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the Division of Gynecologic Oncology, Baylor College of Medicine.

Williams-Brown explained the different types of clinical trials, how new drugs are brought to market, the phases of clinical research and how participation works—that the emphasis today is on safety. She emphasized the importance for African Americans—the majority of the audience—to consider participation to provide researchers with a better mix of populations with different ethnic backgrounds.

“The questions were about how clinical research works for different cancers, specifically

about breast and colon cancer, and diabetes, along with how they could participate,” Williams-Brown told *CWeekly*. She stressed that being part of a clinical trial does not substitute for routine medical care from their local physicians.

Julio Peguero, M.D., took Spanish-speaking members of the audience aside to explain clinical trials to them in Spanish.

Several speakers highlighted their participation in clinical trials, including 24-year-old Jameisha “Meisha” Brown, who at age eight was diagnosed with Burkitt’s lymphoma, a rare, aggressive form of non-Hodgkin’s disease usually found in children. Enduring a chemotherapy regimen of six to eight treatments every three weeks over the course of a year, plus several surgeries and radiation, she spent many school days at M.D. Anderson. She talked about how her family helped her make the decision of clinical trial participation.

“At first I thought I had a bad cold and a stomach virus, not knowing that cancer was a bad thing when you are in second grade,” said Brown, who has been cancer free for 15 years. “At one point I was not eating anything by mouth, fed through a feeding tube to my stomach, as my tumor had spread through the abdomen. Having gone through it, I soon realized that despite those moments of frustration, participating in research is worth enduring, as it helps not only you, but others, too. We cancer survivors know we are in the fight of our lives, and if it helps you it also will benefit others. You also grow up fast.”

She received a standing ovation.

The group also heard about current clinical

trials for cancer survivors, the importance of exercise and weight management and how a trial is organized from Karen Basen-Engquist, Ph.D., M.P.H., professor of behavioral science and director of the Center for Energy Balance in Cancer Prevention and Survivorship at M.D. Anderson.

She announced a new prevention study for women with a high risk of endometrial cancer and tried to engage attendees to participate in the trial.


“I told them that this is a trial where we are looking at a medication to prevent endometrial cancer and a lifestyle intervention that it is based on a diabetes prevention program,” Dr. Basen-Engquist told *CWeekly*. “The group asked interesting questions, as they seemed to want more information.”

Sponsorship of the free program in Houston was provided by **EMD/Serono**, which also has provided grants for previous AWARE for All programs in Seattle and St. Louis that covered general trial participation across all indications. Plans call for a Boston program this fall.

“We’re looking for a fifth site and are open to other cities, which people can nominate through CISCRP,” said McNair, noting that M.D. Anderson had nominated Houston and spent more than three months organizing the event. She added CISCRP is open to holding another disease-specific event as well.


The event also prompted Texas Governor Rick Perry to declare May 9 “Clinical Research Education Day.”


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